



## Article

# What do participants perceive as the attributes of a good adventure sports coach?

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7 What do Participants Perceive as the Attributes of a Good Adventure Sports Coach?

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents a mixed-method investigation of client's perceptions of a good adventure sports coach. Semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically, and the findings used to inform a subsequent larger survey that sought to verify the importance of the themes identified in the interviews. The findings draw an alignment between the attributes of good coaches in traditional sports, as reported in previous studies, and those of adventure sports coaches. However, they also identify three additional attributes that are critical for good adventure sports coaches: (1) in-depth knowledge of the adventure sports environment, (2) a very high degree of individualisation, and (3) an explicit focus on developing the participant's confidence. The implications for training adventure sports coaches are discussed.

Keywords: adventure sports coaching, coach's attributes, coach's knowledge, individualisation, self-efficacy

41 Adventure sports are growing in popularity (O’Keefe, 2019), consequently there has  
42 been an increase interest in understanding coaching practice in this domain. However, much  
43 of the research investigating adventure sports coaching has relied upon the self-reporting of  
44 highly experienced and qualified coaches (e.g., Christian, Berry, & Kearney, 2017; Collins &  
45 Collins, 2015; Collins, Carson, & Collins, 2016). Similarly, Becker (2009) reports that the  
46 majority of coaching research explores the effectiveness of coaching rather than the  
47 characteristics of the coach themselves. Becker reports six dimensions of great coaching;  
48 coach attributes, the environment, relationships, the system, coaching actions, and influences.  
49 And states ‘Great coaches [are not only coaches], but extraordinary people who left lasting  
50 impressions on the lives’ on those they coach (p. 112). Reflecting the potential impact of  
51 coaches and the impact of adventurous environments on individuals (Mackenzie & Brymer,  
52 2018), it seems sensible to extent Becker’s investigation into adventure sports coaching.  
53 Additionally, to understand adventure sports coaching practice from a different perspective,  
54 we previously investigated what participants sought from their coaching experience  
55 (Eastabrook & Collins, 2019) and reported that participants were unable to separate coaches’  
56 attributes from the coaching process. Consequently, there are three aspects of this this study;  
57 (1) reflecting on the participants’ lack of perceived separation, it seems logical to further  
58 investigate what good coaching is in the adventure domain, (2) to continue our original line  
59 of investigation into adventure sport coaching from the perspective of participants rather than  
60 coach and, (3) to extend and narrow the remit of Becker’s investigation into adventure sports  
61 coaching. We expand our earlier study to ask a group of adventure sport coaching  
62 participants, What are the attributes of a good adventure sports coach? With the aim to  
63 inform and improve adventure sports coach training and education. We first explore the

64 attributes of good coaches in both traditional and adventure sports as reported in previous  
65 studies.

## 66 **Review of existing literature**

67 Many authors (e.g., Becker, 2009; Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2009; Côté & Gilbert,  
68 2009; Côté & Sedgwick, 2003; Light & Evans, 2013; Nash, Martindale, Collins, &  
69 Martindale, 2012; Weiss, Barber, Sisley, & Ebbeck, 1991) have discussed the characteristics  
70 of good coaches and offered numerous perspectives of what constitutes good coaches in a  
71 range of sports. Commonly, these characteristics include having excellent subject knowledge  
72 and interpersonal, pedagogic, leadership, and management skills.

### 73 ***Coaches' knowledge***

74 Côté, Saimela, Trudel, Baria, and Russell (1995) have highlighted the value placed on  
75 declarative knowledge by a group of expert gymnastic coaches. This contrasts with Saury and  
76 Durand (1998), who suggest that an experienced coach has access to implicit knowledge as  
77 'professional know-how' (p. 264). As Sinfield, Allen, and Collins (2019) recognise, the  
78 reality entails a synergy of both declarative and implicit knowledge to achieve the adaptive  
79 coaching required in the adventure context. This aligns with the findings of Collins and  
80 Collins (2016a, 2016b) and Tozer, Fazey, and Fazey (2007) regarding adaptive requirements.  
81 Both sets of authors describe adaptability and flexibility as key attributes of high-level  
82 adventure sports coaches, and suggest this is a response to the situational demands created by  
83 a hyper-dynamic coaching environment and the complexity of the individual being coached  
84 (Collins & Collins, 2015; Collins & Collins, 2016a). Fluid notions of knowledge and  
85 expertise seem to be integral to the practices of the coach in adventure sports. Collins,  
86 Collins, & Carson (2016) exemplify this as 'knowledge made usable and reliable in context  
87 by it becoming tacit following a period of reflection on extensive experience' (p. 5). Indeed,

88 knowledge gathered from experience via reflection is critical in this regard and is logically  
89 developed through interaction with clients, understanding their developmental needs and  
90 wants, and a close rapport with them.

91         The high value of knowledge constructed from reflection on experience may, in part,  
92 explain why coaches have been found to see little value in formal coach education as reported  
93 by Nelson, Cushion, and Potrac (2006). Similarly Sinfield et al. (2019) argue that more  
94 experienced coaches may actually benefit from formalised education because their  
95 experience brings context to their training. Therefore, and in agreement with Stoszowski  
96 and Collins (2012), it seems necessary to include the reflective skills needed to make sense of  
97 lived experiences in coach education. Such approaches clearly help to create the ‘lifelong  
98 learners committed to personal growth’ (p. 221) highlighted by Côté (2006) as a key attribute  
99 of effective coaches. Lifelong learning within the adventure coaching sector aligns with the  
100 sophisticated epistemological position high-level adventure sport coaches hold (Christian,  
101 Hodgson, Berry, & Kearney, 2019, Collins & Collins, 2016a). This sophisticated position  
102 adds a depth and complexity to the adventure sport coaches knowledge.

### 103 *Coaches’ interpersonal skills*

104         At the heart of the coach–athlete relationship are coaches’ interpersonal skills.  
105 Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, and Carbonneau (2011) describe the relationship between  
106 coaches and athletes as one marked by interdependence. In practical terms and particularly  
107 pertinent is this interdependence in adventure sports, adventure sports coaches and clients  
108 undertake the activity together (Collins & Collins, 2012). Coaching poses an inherent  
109 challenge for the coach, who must manage the process with, and for the participant (Buckley,  
110 2012; Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016). Coaches must consider, for example, the difficulty of a  
111 task (e.g., chosen climbing route), the influence of the environment (e.g., sea state), or

112 psychosocial factors (e.g., peer pressure) on the participant while measuring the effectiveness  
113 of the coaching relationship. This interdependence requires a two-way flow of information  
114 and trust, whereby coaches set appropriate goals for clients and support them to achieve those  
115 goals. Mageau and Vallerand (2003) have termed such behaviour as autonomy supportive.

116           Additionally, the social aspect of adventure sports is recognised as important by Kerr  
117 and Mackenzie (2012) and Mackenzie and Brymer (2018). The coach accompanies the client  
118 on the adventure, a friendly demeanour and rapport with the client in challenging situations  
119 project a positive attitude toward goal achievement (Ianiro, Lehmann-Willenbrock, &  
120 Kauffeld, 2015). Likewise, Gray and Collins (2016) report the interpersonal strategies used  
121 by adventure sports coaches, including intuitive social engagement, though they suggest this  
122 is not used at a strategic level. In team sports, Gearity (2012) reports how interpersonal skills  
123 and social engagement can be used to create a positive coaching environment, highlighting a  
124 link to the coach's teaching ability.

### 125 *Coaches' teaching and pedagogical skills*

126           Gearity (2012) states that coaches should be 'knowledgeable of the technical, tactical,  
127 and mental skills of their sport and also how to facilitate athletes' learning' (p. 91), namely a  
128 declarative knowledge of the activity and also the pedagogic and andragogic skills required to  
129 facilitate development. Particularly within adventure sports coaching, coaches face the  
130 complexities of individual motivations and hyper-dynamic environmental pressures (Collins  
131 & Collins, 2016a). Adventure sports coaches have developed multiple approaches to facilitate  
132 effective learning in a variety of contexts (Collins et al., 2016), which may be illustrative of  
133 the sophisticated epistemological position (Schommer, 1994) that has been identified in high-  
134 level adventure sports coaches (Christian et al., 2017). This sophistication is reflected in the  
135 ability to utilise different approaches rather than a fixed didactic approach.

136 Closely linked with this possible epistemological stance is the stated aim of high-level  
137 adventure sports coaches to individualise the coaching process (Christian et al., 2017; Collins  
138 et al., 2015). However, it remains unclear what is being individualised. For instance,  
139 adventure sports coaches are expected to make decisions on the teaching approach as well as  
140 the technical skills to be taught in response to students' learning needs (Collins & Collins,  
141 2016b). A focus on the students' learning needs is, potentially, in contrast to that of  
142 traditional sports coaching. Bloom, Crumpton, & Anderson (1999) identified that expert  
143 basketball coaches spent 60% of their time teaching the technical and tactical aspects of their  
144 game. This difference in focus may reflect the stated aims of adventure sports coaches to  
145 develop fully independent performance in their adventure sports students.

#### 146 ***Management and leadership skills***

147 The importance of management and leadership for sports coaches is highlighted by  
148 Sage (1973), who suggests that the two are synonymous in this context. While athletes look  
149 to each other for social trends and team goals, they seek advice from their coaches for  
150 leadership and management relating to physical ability and goal attainment (Price & Weiss,  
151 2013). Both Price and Weiss (2013) and Vella, Oades, and Crowe (2012) propose  
152 transformational leadership as a structure for achieving good leadership because it fosters  
153 confidence and character development. More contextually, however, McElligott (2015)  
154 reports the use of both rewards for meeting specific goals, i.e. rest day after summit, and  
155 developing their intrinsic motivation to reach the summit. These two approaches are  
156 characterised by McElligott as transactional and transformational leadership, hinting at the  
157 sophisticated epistemology identified earlier with regard to approach.

#### 158 ***Perceptions of adventure sports coaching recipients***



159 The reasons participants seek coaching in adventure sports are important. The  
160 motivations to participate in adventure sports are multifaceted (Kerr & Mackenzie, 2012) and  
161 complex (Collins & Brymer, 2018), and consequently the perceptions of good coaching may  
162 also differ, such as those reported by Ojala and Thorpe (2015) in Finnish snowboarders.  
163 More fundamentally, however, Black and Weiss (1992) suggest there is a potential inherent  
164 flaw in investigating client or athlete perspectives. Coaches who are perceived by athletes to  
165 give more information and praise following desirable performances scored higher on the  
166 measures of perceived success and competence. This may challenge the adventure sports  
167 coach who may use bandwidth feedbacking, for instance, in order to develop independence  
168 and lifelong learning in a participant. Such approaches may not be considered as good by the  
169 participant but do reflect the coach's epistemological position. The potential epistemology  
170 misalignment could lead to miscomprehension for both coach and client where the participant  
171 perceive they are receiving poor coaching but might actually be taught towards a different  
172 motivation for participation.

173 Consequently, understanding what participants perceive as good coaching would  
174 appear critical if adventure sports coaches are to be perceived as competent, professional,  
175 effective, and offering value for money.

## 176 **Methodology**

177 A two-part (qualitative and quantitative) mixed-method approach (Robson, 2011) was  
178 adopted. Part 1 was a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with a small sample  
179 size ( $n = 15$ ), which was then used to inform Part 2, a web-based descriptive design survey  
180 (Dunlock, 1993) with a larger sample size ( $n = 202$ ).

### 181 ***Part 1: Qualitative phase***

182 *Authors*

183           The primary author conducted all the following data collection and analysis. They are  
184 a high-level adventure sports coach with ten years' experience working across the UK and  
185 Europe. The second author is a highly experienced adventure sport coach with over thirty  
186 years of experience coaching in the UK and Europe. Both authors take a pragmatic and  
187 subjective epistemological position, one that acknowledges multiple interpretation of reality  
188 rather than a grand single theory as such we seek a probable truth rather than generalizable  
189 findings.

### 190 *Participants*

191           The study participants were recruited in a stratified random representative sample (n =  
192 15) against the following criteria: (1) being an adventure sport participant, (2) undertaking a  
193 five-day coached adventure sports programme, and (3) openness and willingness to engage in  
194 the research. The sample was representative and reflected gender and age (female n = 6, male  
195 n = 9, mean age = 43), and predominantly activities (mountaineering and rock climbing; n =  
196 11 and canoeing and kayaking; n = 4).

### 197 *Data collection*

198           Participants were invited to consider their participation at the start of their coaching  
199 programme and were provided with an information sheet. Following agreed consent, semi-  
200 structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in a comfortable and convenient location at  
201 the end of the programme or via Skype (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014) within five days of the  
202 programme end. Interviews were conducted over the autumn, winter, and spring of 2017–18.  
203 The interviews adopted an informal approach following the interview guide found in Table 1  
204 and aimed to expose unanticipated themes and develop a better understanding of the  
205 responses to the questions (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2006). Participants were asked to recall  
206 their recent coaching experience and encouraged to articulate the characteristics of the

207 particular coach who facilitated that experience. Interviews notes were made during the  
208 recording in the form of bracketing (Ahern, 1999), and kept for consideration during later  
209 analysis. All interviews were recorded digitally for transcription. This structure was  
210 cognitively piloted before use with a smaller representative sample (n = 2) with 2 adjustments  
211 made to the structure and 11 changes to language made prior to use (Drennan, 2003).

212 *Insert table 1 close to this point.*

### 213 *Analysis*

214 Interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy by checking against  
215 the digital recording (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The  
216 transcripts were then ‘codified while listening to the original recording’ (J. A. Smith, Larkin,  
217 & Flowers, 2009, p. 82) and a thematic analysis was subsequently conducted (Fereday &  
218 Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Initial coding of responses was conducted in three cycles to gain  
219 saturation from different perspectives, before grouping into low-order themes. Once  
220 convergence was found, the process was repeated to gain mid-order themes. This procedure  
221 allowed the data to be compared with existing concepts while remaining open to the  
222 recognition and comprehension of new themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The significance of  
223 themes was not solely attributed to frequency but also to the emphasis derived from  
224 annotations taken during the interview.

### 225 ***Part 2: Quantitative phase***

226 Following the interviews, a survey was conducted to assess the views of a larger  
227 sample who had received adventure sports coaching. The aim was to improve the reliability  
228 of the findings from Part 1. Zohrabi (2016) suggested researchers ‘should try to involve most  
229 participants in all phases of inquiry’ (p. 259) to utilise the benefits of member checking  
230 (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). The use of member checking in this matter reflects the concerns of

231 Smith and McGannon (2018) and has the aim of seeking confirmation from the same  
232 population rather than the individual interviewee. The subsequent question was ‘How  
233 important are the attributes identified in Part 1 to a broader population?’

#### 234 *Participants*

235 A convenient, self-selecting sample was utilised with the same criteria as Part 1.  
236 Respondents were asked to complete an online survey over the summer of 2018. The link  
237 was shared across eight outdoor sport communities on social media, for example, Rock  
238 Climbers UK and ‘Slightly’ White Water Kayaking. This resulted in a total of 250 responses,  
239 of which 202 were considered acceptable. Incomplete surveys were rejected, with a  
240 completion rate of 81%. The self-selecting nature of this sample differed from the  
241 demographics in Part 1, with female participants (n = 78, 38%) sampling higher and water-  
242 based activities (n = 134, 66%) dominant.

#### 243 *Data collection*

244 The two high-order themes identified in Part 1 informed the questions in the survey  
245 design. The mid-order themes acted as the focus for the sub-questions, and alterations to  
246 language were made to improve accessibility and understanding. A point allocation method  
247 was used as described by Doyle, Green and Bottomley (1997), where respondents were asked  
248 to weigh the importance of each mid-order theme by dividing 100 points between all the mid-  
249 order themes (respondents had to use all 100 points). For example, a question with three sub-  
250 questions could be 98, one, and one, or 33, 33, and 34, depending on the respondent’s feeling.  
251 This allocation of points had two advantages. Firstly, it encouraged the respondents to  
252 consider the mid-order themes carefully, addressing survey fatigue (Sinickas, 2007) by  
253 utilising an alternative to the commonly used Likert scales. Secondly, Part 2 aimed to  
254 understand the *relative* importance of the mid-order themes to inform the comprehension of

255 the high-order themes. Doyle et al. discuss the advantages of ranking and points allocation  
256 and, although Doyle et al. report ranking as preferred by users because it required less  
257 cognitive effort, this is the reason points allocation was used here: to make the respondents  
258 think. A cognitive pilot was also applied to a representative sample (n = 6) (Drennan, 2003)  
259 and the language refined as a result. An incentive in the form of a chance to win a shopping  
260 voucher was offered for completing the survey with the winner being randomly selected.

### 261 *Analysis*

262 A simple descriptive statistical analysis was applied to show the mean, standard  
263 deviation, and skew for each question.

## 264 **Results and discussion**

### 265 *Part 1*

266 The thematic analysis of the transcripts found 243 codified units. These were  
267 subsequently grouped into ten mid-order themes and two high-order themes, as shown in  
268 Table 2. The two high-order themes are coaching behaviours and the capacity to adapt.

269 *Insert table 2 close to this point.*

### 270 *Part 2*

271 The descriptive analysis of the survey is reported in Table 3. This survey identified  
272 the relative importance of each mid-order theme within each high-order theme. To give the  
273 results the most meaning, the two parts have been integrated within the discussion to give  
274 each mid-order theme a sense of relative importance within the two high-order themes.

275 *Insert table 3 close to this point.*

### 276 *Coaching behaviour*

277           The participants reported that they utilised the coaches as sources of confidence.  
278   Gemma spoke about ‘feeling that the coach gives you the confidence to explore’, referring to  
279   the exploration of new experiences as well as her abilities. This attribute of coaching  
280   behaviour is the most prominent, with 141 respondents in Part 2 giving it the highest value  
281   ( $m = 24.9$ ). The coaches’ role in supporting the development of their clients’ confidence took  
282   three forms – verbal reassurance, personal accomplishments, and vicarious experiences – and  
283   possibly reflects the risks associated with adventure sports participation. Bandura’s (1977)  
284   work on self-efficacy supports the existence of these roles, noting that personal  
285   accomplishments are a stronger source of information, while vicarious experiences are less  
286   dependable. Alfie recalled a mountaineering experience and said that ‘having reached the  
287   summit by the North Ridge is good for [my] confidence’, because his personal goal had been  
288   achieved. Dorothy reported that her coach ‘is here telling us it’s fine’, giving a clear example  
289   of verbal reassurance. Reuben highlighted the value of vicarious experiences and stated that  
290   the coaches ‘recounted their own tales...that no matter what you are trying to do, you feel  
291   that they have done it before’. Dorothy gained her confidence through reassurance, Alfie via  
292   his accomplishments, and Reuben by engaging with his coach’s prior experiences. Thus, each  
293   client seemed to be able to source the information and confidence-building support they  
294   needed from their coach.

295           The participants valued interpersonal skills highly, in common with perceptions of  
296   good coaching found outside the ambit of adventure sports (Becker, 2009; Black & Weiss,  
297   1992; Côté & Sedgwick, 2003; Curran, Hill, Hall, & Jowett, 2015). Sixty-nine respondents  
298   ranked this aspect of coaching behaviour as the most important ( $m = 23.5$ ). Rachael  
299   highlighted the link between rapport and trust in the coaches’ judgement and stated that a  
300   ‘good relationship or rapport with the instructor [coach] is vital because you got to be able to  
301   trust their judgement’. Pearce linked rapport with his learning and explained that ‘rapport is

302 so important for the development of skills’, while Griff said that the coaches are ‘making sure  
303 everyone is getting what they want from the course’. Griff highlighted the relationship  
304 between rapport and achieving the client’s goals and their desired coaching experience  
305 (Eastabrook & Collins, 2019). The coaches appear to be strategically using their rapport with  
306 their clients in a more sophisticated manner than previously reported by Gray and Collins  
307 (2016)

308 Participants in this study valued high levels of enthusiasm in their coaches, and it was  
309 the third-ranked aspect of coaching behaviour ( $m = 20.4$ ) in Part 2. Dennis broadly asserted  
310 that his coach had ‘got a really positive outlook on life coming through’. More specifically,  
311 Kristian linked the coaches’ enthusiasm to their coaching practice, stating that such  
312 ‘enthusiasm for coaching was infectious’, while Gemma declared that her coach ‘loves being  
313 outside’. This highlights that coaches were enthusiastic about their coaching and the given  
314 adventure activity, demonstrating commitment and emotional investment in their clients’  
315 development. Such attitudes affect both goal setting and client support in adventurous  
316 contexts.

317 The coach’s credibility as a coach and also a respected practitioner of adventure  
318 sports appears to be a unique aspect of adventure sports coaching practice, as this was not  
319 reported in the literature of traditional sports coaching. While this aspect was implicit in  
320 Collins and Collins’ findings (2012, 2016a), it was explicit in this study and was ranked  
321 fourth by the respondents in Part 2 ( $m = 15.8$ ). Alfie would only receive coaching from  
322 someone if ‘they have credibility’ in *his* terms. While credibility is desirable, it is unclear  
323 what makes a coach credible to clients, and thus, how it could be enhanced. Consequently,  
324 this is an area that requires further investigation.

325           Linked closely to credibility is the coaches' capacity to inspire participants. Tommy,  
326 for example, stated that 'a highly qualified coach can inspire you to continue learning'. The  
327 coaches' ability to be inspirational was ranked fifth ( $m = 15.5$ ) by the respondents. There are  
328 two aspects to being inspired in this context. Firstly, the client is inspired by the coach's  
329 performance, both as a coach and as a performer, a unique aspect of adventure sports coaches  
330 (Collins & Collins, 2012). The clients want their coach to genuinely enjoy their job as this  
331 enhances the coaching experience for the client (Eastabrook and Collins, 2019). The second  
332 is routed in the developmental goals of the coaching. Inspired clients may be more likely to  
333 practice and thus to continue their development independently.

#### 334 *Capacity to adapt*

335           The coaches' capacity to individualise the whole coaching experience was a key  
336 factor in the perception of good coaching by the participants in this study. Individualisation  
337 was ranked highest by 168 respondents in Part 2 ( $m = 24.5$ ). Individualisation in this context  
338 was multifaceted and extended beyond the teaching of individual aspects of a sport, as  
339 reported by Ives (2008). For example, Dorothy highlighted the coaches' ability to identify the  
340 correct starting point of the coaching process via observation and questioning and stated that  
341 'the coaches are so great at building on where you are as an individual'. Alfie said that his  
342 coach was able to give him 'space to work it out, so I'm not just remembering something  
343 they've said, I'm actually understanding'. This latter point from Alfie highlights his desire for  
344 the coach to align their teaching with how Alfie wants to learn at that point. Jack linked  
345 individualisation to risk tolerance, stating that '[I] achieved something I wouldn't have done  
346 if he [the coach] hadn't been there', thus linking individualisation back to the development of  
347 confidence highlighted earlier. Jack would not otherwise have attempted the activity because  
348 of his perception of the involved risk and level of challenge that creates. Additionally and  
349 uniquely, individualisation was extended to the participants' conceptualisation of adventure



350 (see Mackenzie & Brymer, 2018) by the coaches. Dennis explained that the coaching he  
351 received allowed him to no longer be 'at the behest of other people's plans', giving him the  
352 freedom to make his own decisions regarding his own participation and adventurous  
353 experiences.

354 Jack 'wanted to be imparted knowledge by someone who has been there, done it and  
355 knows what they are on about'. The coaches' depth of knowledge was clearly linked with  
356 credibility, as cited earlier, and it was ranked as the second most important factor in Part 2 (m  
357 = 23.5). Such a desire is common in cases of good coaching within other sports, as identified  
358 by multiple authors (Côté et al., 1995; Light & Evans, 2013; Nelson et al., 2006). Two  
359 additional aspects of the adventure sport coaches' knowledge could be identified: (1) the  
360 desire for more knowledge stems from a desire to be independent of coaches, and (2) the  
361 coaches are expected to have knowledge of the hyper-dynamic context of their coaching.  
362 Tommy exemplified the former: 'when you are doing that on your own, you have to dig from  
363 your own experience and knowledge base in order to make that decision'. Moreover, Kristian  
364 noted that a good coach has 'been there and can take you to interesting places'. Lori  
365 highlighted that participations expect the coaches to have knowledge regarding the  
366 environment and coaching, building on their own experiences. This echoes the assertions of  
367 Collins et al. (2016), that a coach's knowledge gathered from experience and reflection is  
368 critical.

369 The coaches' ability to observe and analyse was ranked third within the high-order  
370 theme (m = 19.9) and was an integral aspect of the individualisation of the coaching process.  
371 Alfie expected his coach to observe with 'a critical eye and analyse what you are doing and  
372 be able to pick up what you are doing wrong'. The participants wanted their coach to act as a  
373 critical friend. This highlights the need for coach and client to be in alignment with regard to  
374 the client's long-term goals.

375 Participants valued coaches with a broad range of coaching strategies, ranking this  
376 aspect as fourth in Part 2 (m = 17.3). Dennis appreciated his coach as he ‘explained  
377 something in multiple different ways’ and stated? the rest of the group also valued this.  
378 Meanwhile, Alfie noted that his coach was able to offer a more difficult route up to the  
379 summit that was their goal ‘rather than picking an easier route’ for the whole group. Clearly,  
380 in this case the coach sought to employ several practical strategies to achieve the same goal  
381 while also maintaining client security, demonstrating highly individualised and sophisticated  
382 judgement.

383 Dennis expected his coach to find out ‘what are his aspirations, what can he do, [then]  
384 modify the course’ to suit him, and a flexible programme was ranked fifth in terms of  
385 importance by the respondents in Part 2 (m = 17.1). Indeed, flexibility is required both on the  
386 part of coaches and their employers/organisations. To meet the aspirations of participants,  
387 coaches need to be adaptable within a flexible infrastructure. Additional resources such as  
388 transport, extra coaches, or indoor facilities may also be required to this end. However,  
389 highly qualified coaches and logistical support for the desired flexibility may have cost-  
390 related implications for coaches and their employers, and such options may not always be  
391 feasible during a single-course programme.

### 392 *Attributes of a good adventure sports coach*

393 Participants in this study valued the coaches’ ability to enhance the coaching  
394 experience (Eastabrook & Collins, 2019) by utilising a range of nuanced behaviours. The  
395 respondents had an expectation of a thorough coaching process distinct from a guided or led  
396 experience. People seeking coaching in any sport want their coaches to have the capacity to  
397 adapt in response to their learning needs and the environmental demands. However, the high-  
398 order themes indicate that three aspects specifically characterise good adventure sports

399 coaches: knowledge of the environment, the extent and nature of individualisation, and the  
400 coach's ability to act as a source of confidence. These aspects extend beyond the descriptors  
401 for good coaching in other sports and given the importance placed on these attributes by the  
402 participant mean that these could be considered unique to adventure sports coaching.

#### 403 *Knowledge of the adventure environment*

404         It seems critical that coaches possess in-depth knowledge of the adventure sports  
405 coaching environment. There are three aspects to the coaching environment. The coaches  
406 need to understand the practicalities of coaching in adventurous environments, including  
407 where to go, the impact of the weather and its impact (see Aadland, Vikene, Varley and Moe  
408 (2017) as an example). Coaches need to be sensitive to the social and cultural environment  
409 that is desired by participants of adventure (see Lorimer and Holland-Smith (2012) as an  
410 example). This goes beyond merely understanding the dynamic environment as an adventure  
411 sport participant and includes how the environment interacts with a task and the individual.  
412 The participants expect this knowledge to stem from a coach's extensive experience of the  
413 activity and environment. This environmental knowledge extends beyond simple situation  
414 awareness as described by Endsley (1997) into the comprehension of the factors causing the  
415 situation and an ability to project its implications on the students' learning, however specific  
416 research into this is required to more fully understand this aspect of the adventure sport  
417 coaches knowledge.

#### 418 *Expansive individualisation of the coaching and adventure experience*

419         The notion of individualisation in adventure sports extends beyond the teaching of  
420 technical skills and encompasses the client's perception of good teaching. This involves  
421 being able to coach in a way that aligns with clients' perceptions of good teaching to gain  
422 their trust and build rapport before exploring more sophisticated approaches to improving

423 their performance. Closely linked to this is the coaches' tolerance of risk, which allows them  
424 to manage the risk-versus-benefit decisions lying at the heart of coaching in this sector  
425 (Collins & Collins, 2013) by comprehending the concomitant potential benefits to students'  
426 and clients' conceptualisation of participation: specifically, how they want to participate. The  
427 latter aspect might include, for example, whether clients are more interested in developing  
428 their technical abilities to deal with more challenging environments or in reaching a technical  
429 level that satisfies their desired engagement with the wilderness (Eastabrook & Collins,  
430 2019).

#### 431 *An explicit development of confidence*

432 Participants expect coaches to act as a source of confidence, with an appropriate level  
433 of challenge is required for the activity to feel authentic enough to achieve goal  
434 accomplishment. This level must be judged carefully by the coach, similar to the risk-versus-  
435 benefit decision cited above. The participants in this study reported their coaches' use verbal  
436 reassurance in their abilities, vicarious experiences lived via the coach, and the coaches'  
437 personal accomplishments are helpful for achieving their goals and aspirations. These  
438 strategies develop self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

#### 439 **Limitations and future research**

440 As reported by Weiss et al. (1991), there is an inherent issue with clients' perceptions  
441 of good coaching: namely, coaches who say nice things to participants might make them feel  
442 good, but that is not necessarily good coaching. Similarly, 'good' coaching is a subjective  
443 term. This subjectivity raises the question of whether what is perceived as good coaching  
444 within a commercial setting, i.e., happy, repeat clients, is the same as what is perceived as  
445 good coaching in a developmental context. Both contexts are valuable but are not separated  
446 in this study, thereby presenting the contentious issue of commodification in adventure sports

447 (see Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Loynes, 1998; Varley, 2006). The commodification of  
448 adventure sports opens a further line of enquiry to understand how commodification affects  
449 coaching practice. Additionally, these findings only reflect a sample of British people's  
450 perception of good coaching. Therefore, to further understand the perceived attributes of  
451 good adventure sports coaches, it seems logical to extend the study size and location. It is a  
452 further point of inquiry as it is not clear how coaches develop these attributes, as they do not  
453 appear to be aspects of national governing adventure sports coach education. If national  
454 governing bodies recognise the need for the attributes detailed in this study, then it seems  
455 logical that a further study may be required to determine how these can be developed in  
456 novice coaches.

## 457 **Conclusion**

458 The findings demonstrate that many of the participants' perceptions of good coaching  
459 are common to both adventure and traditional sports. However, importantly this study also  
460 provides evidence for three key attributes that are particularly critical for and pertinent to  
461 adventure sport coaches: (1) a rich and in-depth knowledge of the dynamic coaching  
462 environment and how it interacts with the individual; (2) an explicit, highly individualised  
463 approach that includes clients' conceptualisation of their participation in adventure sports;  
464 and (3) an ability to act on and develop participants' confidence. These perceptions present  
465 challenges for the adventure sport coach. Clearly the coach must fully comprehend the  
466 learners' needs and motivations. To meet them, be able to employ a range of technical and  
467 teaching strategies, and significantly, to have a full understanding of the adventurous setting.  
468 These findings offer a different perspective on adventure sport coaching and the way in  
469 which coaches might be trained and evaluated. Specifically, measuring coaching beyond the  
470 measurement of performance in a traditional sense. Which in turn does demonstrate a need  
471 for further research regarding performance in adventure sports. Furthermore, these findings

472 strengthen the need for further research to investigate how adventure sport coaching  
473 knowledge, adventure sport individualisation and confidence is developed for future explicit  
474 inclusion in coach education and development.

#### 475 **Disclosure statement**

476 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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<b>Initial Question</b>	<b>Secondary Question</b>	<b>Prompts</b>
Administration		
	Questions	
	Signed consent	
	Remind interviewee they are free to withdraw at any time	
Can you tell me about your most recent coaching session?	Where did it take place?	Location
	Who was it with?	Duration
	What was the best part?	Commercial operator
What did you expect from the overall experience?	Any learning objectives?	TTPP
	Experiencing any specific issues?	Enjoyment
	New challenge or environments?	Culture of adventure
How did the coach meet your expectations?	How friendly was the coach or their warmth of welcome?	Quality of resources
	Was there a personalised plan for the course?	Teaching ability
	What activities did you undertake?	The technical ability of the coach
How important was it that the coach took you on a <i>real</i> adventure?	Where did the coaching take place?	Challenge

	Did you feel comfortable in the places you went to?	Learning opportunities
	Do you feel more able to re-visit those places post-coaching?	Self-belief Self-efficacy Adventure
What did the coach do to aid your long-term learning aspirations?	Do you have a specific action plan to follow?	Independence Self-directed learning
	What do you still need to practice?	Environments
	What adventures can you now have?	Challenges Venues Community of practice

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676 Table 2

677 *Thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews*

<b>High-Order Themes (2)</b>	<b>Mid-Order Themes (10)</b>
Coaching behaviour	Coach is the source of confidence
	Interpersonal skills
	Coach's enthusiasm
	Coach was inspirational
	Coach has high credibility
Capacity to adapt	Individualised approach
	Adaptive course programme
	Observation and analysis
	Coach's depth of knowledge
	Range of coaching strategies

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679

680 Table 3

681 *Descriptive data analysis of the survey, displaying relative importance of mid-order themes*

<b>High-Order Theme</b>	<b>Mid-Order Theme</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Skew</b>
Coaching behaviour	Coach is the source of confidence	24.9	11.2	0.7
	Interpersonal skills	23.5	10.3	1.8
	Coach's enthusiasm	20.4	7.2	0.6
	Coach has high credibility	15.8	8.9	0.6
	Coach is inspirational	15.5	7.9	0.7
Capacity to adapt	Individualised approach	24.5	9.9	1.3
	Coach's depth of knowledge	21.2	9.7	1.9
	Observation and analysis	19.9	7.6	0.7
	Range of coaching strategies	17.3	7.2	-0.4
	Adaptive course programme	17.1	7.3	0.2

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